

I'm glad you called me. No room for amateurs in this game.

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

"Eight legs, two fangs and an attitude", read the cheesy tagline. If ever a movie was ripe for conversion to the gaming medium it's Arachnophobia. It's practically Jaws with spiders, except because everything takes place out of the water it could actually be controllable and fun to play. Hordes of the evil eight-legged freaks are wreaking havoc and need to be obliterated by any means necessary. Gamers like blowing stuff up. It's a match made in heaven.

Today the classic creature-feature horror-comedy (or thrill-omedy as it was horribly coined) has largely been forgotten. Possibly for therapeutic reasons - spiders are the world's number one most feared organism according to phobia polls. Freddie Kruger doesn't exist (probably), spiders are *real* and

live in your bed, toilet, slippers, cereal box, popcorn bucket, dog kennel, clothes basket, nostrils... *trails off*



"People like to be scared but laughing, like a roller coaster. No one wants to be terrified."

Arachnophobia co-producer/director, Frank Marshall

It's a shame Arachnophobia isn't more fondly remembered since it's such an enjoyable ride, bursting with genuine suspense, black humour and believable special effects. It's not as if tongue-in-cheek horror-comedy wasn't marketable, Evil Dead and Gremlins aptly demonstrated that much. Yes, and to prove it's a horror (or is it?), a kid's doll blinks when no-one's looking. Wanna plaaaaaayy?

Unlike Gremlins, most of the terrorising gribblyies in Arachnophobia are in fact real 'actors'. A giant bird-eating tarantula (christened 'Big Bob' after Bob Zemeckis), plus over 300 Avondale spiders shipped in from New Zealand - harmless and docile, yet large and ugly enough to scare the pants off the audience. Only two prop spiders (animatronics) were created to substitute for living versions of the major arachnid villains, to ramp up their extreme monstrosity, though also because they needed to be exterminated and "no animals were harmed in the making of this movie".



When John Goodman is seen crushing one underfoot, the spider was actually enveloped by a specially made shoe with a hollowed out sole. Crisps stood in to produce the crunching sound effects. Elsewhere dummy spiders were substituted for real ones whenever spraying was called for. Clever!

Choreographing the real ones - attaching line to the spiders at times to cajole them into performing - must have been a nightmare for the production team, though totally worth the effort when you see the results. Unless, that is, you're watching the Blu-ray re-issue with its enhanced clarity. This is particularly evident during the obligatory shower scene. Spider pounces on forehead with a thump, girl takes 10 seconds to notice.



No doubt 'Kingdom of the Spiders' (1977), which partially inspired Arachnophobia, looks ropier still today.



Despite the lavish \$22 million budget and the involvement of two bankable actors, plus executive producer Steven Spielberg, *Arachnophobia* was only a marginal hit when first released, generating \$53.2 million at the box office. Small fry when compared to other monster-disaster thrillers such as *Jurassic Park*, *King Kong* (2005), and *Godzilla* (2014), grossing \$914.6 million, \$550.5 million and \$529.1 million respectively. Aww, poor neglected ickle spiders.

Director Frank Marshall's tall tale opens with a glimpse into an Amazonian bug-hunting trek led by entomologist, Dr. James Atherton. His aim is to discover new species of insects and arachnids, though in hindsight I expect he'd happily have slowly backed out of the Venezuelan tepui where he meets one of the jungle's deadliest inhabitants, running away screaming like a little girl once clear of the fumigated drop zone.

Bitten while asleep, nature photographer, Jerry Manley, is the first to succumb to its toxic venom. You could say the effects are terminal; the coffin he's carried off-in is a strong clue. Not content with killing Americans on his home turf, the spider hitches a ride in Manley's coffin destined for Cainama, California. On arrival the 'General' mates with a domestic house spider, setting up camp in a barn belonging to the town's new doctor, Ross Jennings played by Jeff Daniels.

This is perhaps the funniest scene of all; Ross lies to his wife, Molly, "It's bad luck not to make love the first night in a new house."

Exhausted and knowing her husband all too well she retorts, "You just made that up, didn't you, dear?"

They go to bed anyway, then we immediately cut to the two spider lovers replicating the previous scene with the same degree of tender affection and passion. Nothing beats a touching arachnid romance story. It's a mystery why Mills and Boon have never covered this niche.



They build a nest as well as a family, making their house a home. Not the usual 2.4 kids (with two cars in the yard, life used to be so hard), spawning hundreds of infertile drone spiders. Take note, *sirens*, *alarm bells* etc., this is key to the plot. Since the drones are hobbled with a limited lifespan and can't reproduce, the residents have a chance to defeat them.

Little does fish-out-of-water GP, Ross, know that the 'newly-weds' have decided to make his home theirs too. A Yale graduate who uproots his family from 'The Big City' (San Francisco in this case) to embrace remote rural country bumpkinism is as much an outsider as the General so has to work equally hard to earn some of the locals' approval. Redressing the family's work-life balance by down-shifting doesn't quite go to plan, to put it mildly!



Dr. Ross Jennings: What do you wanna bet they're gonna go chase fireflies?

Bunny: Wanna blow up a bullfrog?

Shelley: OK.

Owing to an incident that occurred when he was baby - amounting to seeing some spiders on his cot - Ross suffers from arachnophobia, long before the horrendous outbreak that makes his irrational fear totally legitimate. His son has inherited the condition through learned behaviour.



Ross: It's like it happened yesterday.

Molly: Nobody remembers anything from when they were two.

Ross: It's my first memory. I can envision the crib, all around me, clear as day. I can still feel the feeling of waking up. Just drowsy, peaceful, secure, then there it was.

Molly: Probably just a daddy longlegs.

Ross: It seemed huge. It just came relentlessly, crawling through the bars of the crib. As it touched my bare leg...

Molly: I know, you were just wearing a diaper.

Ross: All my limbs involuntarily froze.

Molly: You were probably still half-asleep.

Ross: I was paralysed, Molly. I still get paralysed. Try to understand how this makes me feel. I was physically unable to stop it from crawling along my naked skin. I can still feel its hairy little legs just... then up to my face. It's the feeling of utter helplessness. Being explored by

an alien thing, that's all. Can you blame me for being a spider-phobe?

Molly: Arachnophobe.

Ross: Whatever.

If this wasn't tongue-in-cheek you'd tell him to get a grip. Brilliant dialogue. I love it!

When Ross visits his predecessor, physician Sam Metcalf, to make the arrangements to hand over his practice he decides not to retire after all, leaving Ross high and dry with no patients. Except for feisty cynic, Margaret, who defects.

Margaret Hollins: In my opinion, Dr Metcalf isn't aware of the difference between his ass and a hole in the ground.

Nevertheless, Ross's services are soon called into demand when the local residents start dropping like flies, beginning with Ross's only patient, Margaret, and soon enough even Metcalf. Spot the waxwork models! Well, would you let the director shove a spider up your nose so it could be filmed coming out again?

Molly: I'm sure you knew exactly what you were doing when you took Margaret off those pills.

Ross: Like I knew what I was doing when I chose this town... with the country doctor from hell!

In one of the most awkward scenes in the history of film, Ross is also recruited to feel the testicles of an entire American football team. Not like *that*, it's a medical assessment thing. Honestly.

Henry Beechwood: Bobby here, he's a, he's a Bronco star quarterback.

Bobby Beechwood: Hi.

Molly Jennings: Hi.

Henry Beechwood: I taught him to throw a football before he could walk. I coach the team.

Molly Jennings: Nepotism huh?

Edna Beechwood: Actually, we're Baptists.

As in Jaws no-one believes that the starring predator could be the culprit of all the unexplained deaths. Naturally, then Ross has a battle on his hands to make a case for exhuming their bodies to perform the autopsies previously deemed unnecessary. It turns out that all the corpses share a common wound pattern that looks suspiciously like spider bites.



Ross calls in spider expert, Atherton (played by Julian Sands aka the Warlock), now back home from his jungle reconnaissance jaunt, to investigate and advise. Atherton eventually puts in a personal appearance after being convinced by his assistant that the threat is real, demanding immediate action.

Enter dial-an-exterminator, Delbert McClintock, played wonderfully for comic effect by John Goodman. His performance is kind of a rehash of Bill Murray's Carl Spackler, the loose-wired groundskeeper in *Caddyshack*. Delbert thinks he's seen it all before, delivering his consummate assessment in a droll, dismissive manner suggesting he has everything under control. Trouble is our designated

professional is lazy and incompetent whilst proudly peacocking his presumed plumage of proficiency, prompting many of the best lines. Wow, that was a pompous panoply of plosives! Good thing this isn't audio. (ed: pretentious pillock!)

Delbert: (after killing a spider) Yeah, that's right, I'm bad!

Delbert McClintock: Would anyone object if I tore this floor out?

Molly Jennings: I would.

Delbert McClintock: False alarm then. Lead on.



Delbert McClintock: There ain't no spiders here.

Collins: Look! There's a giant spider web over there in the corner.

Delbert McClintock: Well yes, a spider web would reveal an arachnid presence.

Sharing vaguely common ground with the snooty academic scientist, Atherton, slobby and slack-jawed Delbert sees them

as two peas in a pod, brothers in arms. Shockingly enough Atherton doesn't feel the same sense of kinship.

Delbert completely steals the show despite not entering the fray until about 50 minutes into the 110-minute saga, quite rightly earning him a best supporting actor Saturn award nomination in 1991. He lost to Thomas F. Wilson who played Buford 'Mad Dog' Tannen and Biff Tannen in Back to the Future Part III. Best actor went to Jeff Daniels for his role in... can you guess? Further uniting the two movies, Michael J. Fox enjoys a split second cameo in Arachnophobia. It's times like this you're grateful for your family ties.

Overcoming his terror of creepy-crawlies Ross is the real hero. Even so, BlueSky chose to pitch Delbert as the protagonist of their multi-format gaming accompaniment what with being a perfect caricature and likely better known to kids familiar with Roseanne (he played Dan Connor of course).

That's what the documentation says anyway. In-game it's a different story; we're actually welcomed to the pest control team by Delbert, so obviously aren't going to be playing as him too. Maybe the development team were working remotely and not staying in touch with one another?



*While you're at it, consult the manual and see if you can
pass the copyright protection check. Very subtle!*



Published by Disney/Titus in 1991, Arachnophobia was available for Amstrad, DOS, Commodore 64 and Amiga platforms. Atari ST and Spectrum gamers were also expecting to be invited to the party, though these incarnations were subsequently cancelled. Somehow a cracked version of the Atari ST game surfaced online in 2017 courtesy of Atari Legend. It's not currently known if this is an unreleased copy acquired from the developers.

Arachnophobia was never actually reviewed by one of the mainstream English Amiga magazine critics, only previewed...

"Deep down in the South American jungle lurks a big, black, furry, venomous, spider. Thanks to some careless entomologists, the beast has now reached North America and is busy spreading Arachnophobia. Based on the cracking Steven Spielberg movie the game will have spider-haters reaching for their joystick.

The scenario casts you as an exterminator, whose bug spray is the only thing powerful enough to stop the spiders. Luckily, you're trapped in the town they've taken over, if you can call that lucky. The mission is simple: poison the little blighters all the way back to Peru, to do this you will have to search houses, schools and barns inhabited by the spiders and rescue the frightened peeps inside. The movie was full of dark corner shocks and pastiche horror, let's hope the game can match up to it."

Amiga Format preview (May 1991)



"Arachno-what?"

Eight legs, two fangs and an attitude, Disney's all-new software label Is due to release its version of Winter's blockbuster Spielberg movie, Arachnophobia. However, Titus, the French developer responsible for the adaptation, isn't sticking to the film's plot, opting instead to base the game around an agent of the McClintock Infestation Management Company (insecticide manufacturers), intent on tracking down the deadly South American spider and killing it. Watch out for Arachnophobia's all-formats appearance during May."

The One preview (April 1991)



Sidelining the movie's pre-epidemic prologue we leap right into the business of bug-bashing. Taking its cues from Activision's 1984 Ghostbusters game we're presented with a bird's eye view of Ross's home town - Canaima - comprising houses, schools, a cemetery and barns. Canaima is actually the real name of the place in Venezuela where the movie begins. Cambria, California, serves as home for the remainder of the movie.

Buildings etc. are arranged in a strict grid structure, visited by Delbert in his infestation management company truck one by one to massacre the invaders.



A bugometre compass in the HUD clues us into the location of the Queen spider, activated once we've destroyed one of her egg sacs. Dispatch her and we move onto the next of the eight towns, ultimately culminating in our promotion to chief bug squisher in the Amazon jungle. It's possible to skip all the other non-Queen-harbours locations and still complete the game under the assumption that taking out the mother will lead to the eventual expiry of the infertile drones, as in the movie.

Doctor James Atherton: In this first generation, the original male also produced a queen, and together they will construct a primary nest which the queen will guard. But eventually, she will create reproductive offspring of her own. And when that happens, this town is dead... and the next town... and the next town... and the next one, and so on.



Once inside the buildings, we must blast the varmints with our Toxi-Max insecticide spray on route to the egg sac, which *may* be protected by the Queen.



In the easier early levels, we can duck under bouncing spiders and be on our way without actually nuking them, assuming we don't get caught up in a progress-hindering web.



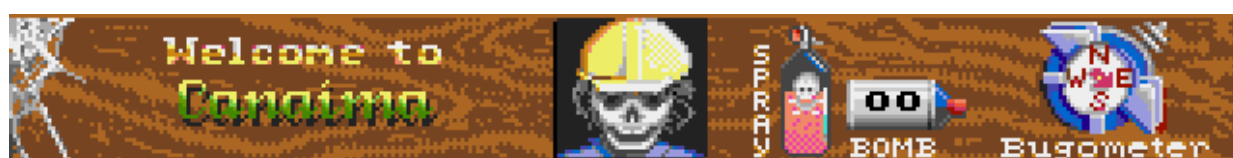
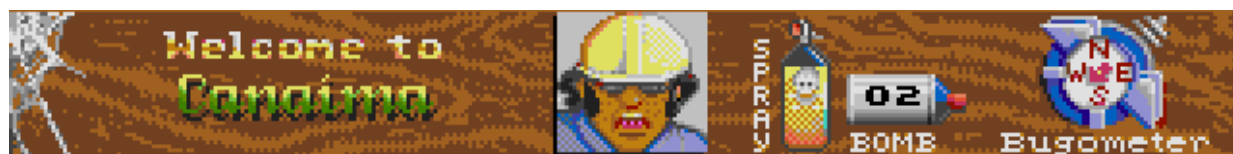
This is a useful way to conserve our limited supply of insecticide. Should we run out we're effectively as useful as a chocolate teapot. Jumping on spiders to squish them is no substitute since we lose energy in the process and swiftly die. Satisfying though all the same!



Returning to the parked truck - where we can replenish our supply - is our only option in this event. Unfortunately, returning inside we discover that the spiders have respawned. Normally they die and persist, leaving a trail of breadcrumbs we can follow to exit the building. Not that this is really necessary - head down (stopping before the basement) and left and we'll get there soon enough.

Leaving and re-entering buildings also equips us with another two bug bombs; gas canisters that clear all soldier spiders on the screen and temporarily incapacitate the Queen allowing us to blast her to kingdom come. We're also awarded an extra one for clearing a house as well as entering a freshly infested one. Plus two more for saving a screaming inhabitant during the later levels. Initially, they're deserted.

Our health status is represented by a Doom-style face in the HUD. As we take hits (or hugs) he begins to take on the appearance of a character from the Munsters. You know, as though we've been dead for months before being dug up.



We can withstand four bites from soldier spiders thanks to our top of the line haz-mat suit. It's not quite as effective against the massive General or Queen - these will send us to an early grave following one or two bites respectively. It could be worse I suppose - in the movie a single bite from any of them is terminal, and the first aid kits containing anti-venom available in the game aren't an option.



In the movie, Ross kills the Queen by electrocution, sets fire to the General with a lighter and flammable aerosol, finishing off the burning inferno with a nail gun. Shot through the guts like a staked vampire the already flame-grilled General flies across the basement into the Queen's nest setting it ablaze, destroying the incubating babies within. Well, he couldn't justify wasting a premium vintage bottle of Chateau Margaux on it! Are we bored with playing spot the puppet strings yet?



In-game the General's downfall isn't quite so spectacular. We can collect an aerosol and matches in separate locations creating a DIY flamethrower and torch the blighter, or if we're very lucky get away with relying only on the bug bombs and spray. There's no sign of a nail gun.

Graphics seen during the core game are perfunctory, not much of a deviation from their Amstrad and C64 counterparts. Static intermissions and the title screen are much more impressive, befitting the quality we've come to expect from the game's American publisher, Disney. In

Europe it was published by Titus who had a much spottier track record.



Music is limited to the title screen with only basic sound effects breaking the silence while we tackle the critters. Instantly recognisable sampled speech courtesy of Mr Goodman is the real highlight, effectively connecting the game to its source material. It's as if he's right there in the room.



Attempt to cleanse all the houses in all the towns and it's a very long, tricky game, the difficulty ramping up as we progress thanks to the increased speed and craftiness of the intruders. Otherwise, the mechanics remain identical from one location to the next, the only motivation to keep playing being to see how BlueSky adapted the rest of the movie's backdrops, or if they veered off the beaten track, employing

artistic license to plug the gaps. Perfect fayre for an 8-bit offering, perhaps a smidgen limited for a 16-bit upgrade. As a budget or multi-pack title we wouldn't have had much cause for complaint.



More of a charming curio, longevity isn't the game's forte. Unlike the movie which is as entertaining today as it was upon first release in 1990. It's over-the-top-ridiculous and will still make you jump out of your skin while you fight in vain to stifle the laughter.

